

**Prepared Remarks for  
Rep. Henry A. Waxman**

**Religious Action Center  
Consultation on Conscience  
Washington, DC  
April 23, 2013**

Thank you, Jennifer, for that kind introduction.

Thank you for inviting me to speak today. It's a pleasure to address the Consultation on Conscience, and I congratulate you all for being here and demonstrating your commitment to social justice.

I want to commend Rabbi David Saperstein, a good friend and a role model for all of us. I thank you for your leadership and your vision.

I also want to thank Barbra Weinstein, the RAC's associate director and the Director of the National Commission on Social Action. She is an indispensable resource to my office and many other members of Congress. The RAC is truly lucky to have her.

I understand that we have some folks here from Los Angeles, which is the area that I represent in Congress.

- Rabbi Joel Simonds of University Synagogue in Los Angeles. Rabbi Simonds was recently in my office, accompanying a group of high school students who were putting their commitment to tikkun olam into action on Capitol Hill;
- Rabbi Stephanie Kolin, the co-Director of Just Congregations; and

- Rabbi Noah Farkas of Valley Beth Shalom in Encino.

I would also like to take note of your program, Travel Justly, encouraging individuals to consider their carbon impact when they travel—whether from air travel, hotels, restaurants. I applaud each of you who are participating in the Travel Justly program when making your way to Washington, helping to build a more sustainable world.

The subject I want to address today is climate change, which I believe is the gravest environmental threat we face – and may be the gravest one we have ever faced. Addressing climate change is a moral obligation.

The RAC is one of many groups that has been speaking out on this serious moral and

environmental crisis. You understand climate change is real. I understand it. And the scientists understand it.

The Torah, in fact, understands that we have a responsibility toward environmental justice. Jewish tradition considers the relationship between humans and the earth to be reciprocal. In fact, last week's Torah portion speaks of the land responding when it is harmed:

“And the land was defiled, and therefore I punished it, and the land spewed out her inhabitants.”

This is violent, reciprocal justice. And, it would seem that the Torah understands the science behind climate change. The land, the weather systems, the oceans—nature will respond to our human acts. There are consequences for our actions that harm the environment.

And similarly, we can prevent the land from being defiled and from feeling the wrath of climate change. We must act to prevent the worst scenarios from becoming reality. And we must protect our children and future generations from the unavoidable impacts.

I've been working on climate change for a long time. I introduced the first legislation to stabilize emissions of carbon pollution in 1992. In 2009, with the help of many you, I shepherded comprehensive carbon pollution legislation through the House of Representatives. Unfortunately, the Senate did not act.

We've made progress despite legislative inaction. Our cars and trucks are clean and getting cleaner ... we've had record deployment

of renewable energy ... dirty power generation is being replaced with cleaner generation.

But these steps are not enough. Our fight is not over, and it is now more critical than ever that we work together to solve this global challenge.

For decades, experts have talked about the potential future impacts from climate change. They've warned that in the future we'll face extreme heat waves, floods, droughts, wildfires, ocean acidification, and dramatic sea level rise. As a result, many thought of climate change not as a problem for now, but as a problem for later.

Well, it's now happening faster than expected.

We are already seeing the powerful effects of climate change on the nation. Scientists are

now observing, measuring, and monitoring extreme events not only in the United States, but throughout the world. We are witnessing the predictions come true ... and they are alarming.

Scientists have attributed to climate change recent extreme weather events such as the 2011 Texas drought which cost \$12 billion, the 2003 summer heat wave across Europe that killed 70,000 people, and the 2008 drought in parts of the Middle East. Carbon pollution continues to load the dice, making the likelihood of extreme temperature and precipitation events more likely.

Superstorm Sandy demonstrates how impacts of climate change on sea level, hurricane intensity, and storm surge can profoundly impact even our largest coastal cities. Storms and other weather events that occurred once in a century are now occurring multiple times in a decade.

This is no longer an issue for “later.” Climate change is a threat to American families – and especially to our children or grandchildren who will bear the brunt of the impacts.

How serious will it be?

According to recent scientific research, if we stay on our current track, by mid-century extreme summer heat waves will be the new “normal,” our coastal communities will face extreme flooding risks, the ocean’s coral reefs could simply dissolve.

We can spend money after disaster strikes or we can spend money today to decrease the risks of these disasters by funding mitigation and adaptation activities.

The Republican House does not want to address this issue. They do not even want to face facts about what the science tells us.

I have written to Fred Upton, the chair of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, over twenty times to request that the Committee hear from scientists so we know the threat we are facing and what we need to do.

We have been rejected every time. We have had plenty of oil and coal executives give their view. But we won't listen to the experts.

That's one reason why I've started the Congressional Bicameral Task Force on Climate Change with Senator Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island. Our goal is to better educate the

public and identify ways we can work together towards real actionable solutions.

I want Congress to act and I believe Congress will act. Every year we delay decisive action, the impacts will worsen and the costs will rise. We cannot change the laws of nature, and they are going to force Congress to confront this issue.

Fortunately, Congress does not need to act for the United States to make progress. I have taken great encouragement from the remarks of the President in his inaugural address and the State of the Union. He has said that if Congress fails to act, he will. He has many authorities at his disposal, including using the Clean Air Act to set emission standards and our energy laws to set energy efficiency standards.

There are tremendous opportunities associated with taking action. You, more than any other group, see and understand those opportunities. Policies that help reduce emissions, fortify our resiliency, and promote clean energy infrastructure will strengthen our economy and create the next generation of jobs.

In fact, just last month, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that over 150,000 green jobs were created in 2011, bringing the nation's total green jobs to over three million. Employment in this space grew at four times the rate of all other jobs combined. These new green jobs, in industries like construction and manufacturing, will continue to support the future clean energy economy.

We must continue this economic growth by working together to build a stronger, cleaner economy. We must encourage the collaboration

of industry and government towards actions to reduce emissions and plan for future impacts. And we must ensure we protect our environment for future generations.

With your support – and the active engagement of the President and his Administration – we can achieve these goals.

Thank you.

Are there questions?